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*Britain's Privileges and Duty.*

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A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

BRIDGE-STREET CHAPEL,

B R I S T O L,

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1794.

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL FAST.

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BY J. DAVIES. *K*

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*He hath not dealt so with any Nation—*

*Praise ye the Lord.*

*Psalm CXLVII, 20.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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*THE glorious Revolution in 1688, ascertained, enlarged and confirmed the liberties of Britain, both civil and religious. That event, the Protestant Dissenters, not only ardently wished for, but exerted all their influence to bring about. Their attachment to the Constitution of this country, as it was then defined and established, has been uniform and steady. Thankful to heaven for the blessings which they, with the rest of their fellow-subjects enjoyed under it, they rallied round its standard, and tendered it their united, vigorous support, whenever it was threatened with danger. J. A*

*Is it then because they are envied this singular honor ; or why else ; that the tongue of reproach is now let loose against them ; that they are indiscriminately traduced and vilified as enemies to the government—as Republicans and Levellers ? The authors of this calumny may be in a state similar to what Jeremiah describes (in the viiith chapter and 12th verse.) “ Nay they were not at all ashamed, neither could thy blush.” To show, however that they ought to blush and be ashamed, is the object of the author, and his friends, in offering to the Public the following plain and hasty performance.*

VIII







## S E R M O N.

JUDGES xvii. 6th.

IN THOSE DAYS THERE WAS NO KING IN  
ISRAEL; BUT EVERY MAN DID THAT WHICH  
WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES.

**I**N the foregoing verses, we have an account of two very heinous transgressions which were committed in that part of the land of Caanan, called Mount Ephraim; and in these words, the sacred historian assigns the cause of them. The transgressions were, *first* the robbing of an opulent, and most probably, avaricious woman, of a very considerable property, by her own son. And *secondly*, when the stolen silver was recovered, the applying it, by the joint consent of the mother and son, to the impious purpose of corrupting the pure worship of God, and introducing idolatry.

It should seem that Micah had so artfully managed this robbery, as to let no circumstance transpire which could create a direct suspicion that he was either the author of it, or privy to it. and yet, he was so alarmed by the furious ravings of his mother, and particularly the dreadful imprecations and curses she uttered upon the occasion, that his heart trembled and fainted within him, and he resolved immediately to discover the whole affair, and make restitution. " He said unto his mother, the eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and speakest of also in mine ears; behold the silver is with me : I took it. And his mother said, blessed be thou of the Lord my son." Wonderful is the power which money has upon some people ! It appeaseth their most furious anger, and filleth their mouths with blessings ! It is added " when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my hand, for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore I will restore it unto thee. Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image, and a molten image; and they were in the house of

Micah

Micah. And the man Micah had an house of Gods, and made an Ephod and Teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest."

Notwithstanding it is not my design to enter upon a minute consideration of this impious transaction, yet may it not be improper to take brief notice of some of its circumstances.

The complexion of the story, and the view it gives us of the disposition of Micah's mother—lead us to suspect, that to dedicate the silver—unto the Lord, as she expresses it, was what she had never thought of until it was stolen; and also that her motive for making such a vow *then*, was the expectation that she should thereby engage Heaven in some way to interpose, and assist her to recover it. This is the more probable, because when she received her eleven hundred shekels again, it was only *two hundred* shekels, she gave to the founder, whereof to make the graven and molten images; reserving for herself *nine* hundred shekels.

We may here observe, in how partial a manner people often perform the vows which they make unto the Lord. When alarmed with dangers, or born down by distresses, their promises of gratitude



gratitude to Heaven, if they are delivered, are very large. But when they have enjoyed the salvation they cried for, the returns they make for it are too often very scanty and inadequate.

It can hardly be supposed, that those images were designed to be objects of direct adoration, in opposition to the true God: the affair looks rather as a device for worshipping God at home, through the medium of the images. The ark of the testimony was then at Shiloh; and notwithstanding the affluent circumstances of this family enabled them to repair thither to worship with less inconvenience than many of their neighbours; yet so little zeal had they for God and religion, that they considered it as too laborious to go so far, and therefore resolved to have their *Chapel of Ease* at home. And in order to render their corruption of the pure worship of Jehovah more plausible, and of consequence, more likely to engage their neighbours, and others to join with them in it, they prepared an *Ephod* (a dress resembling that of the priests) to be worn by him who officiated in it.—Idolatry, or the forsaking of the living God and going after dumb images, was the wickedness which so often brought down the vengeance of Heaven upon Israel; and this

is the first instance we have of their falling into it, after they gained possession of the land of Caanan.

The cause of this gross and early corruption is assigned in the text. " In those days there was no King in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." And I apprehend that it has generally been the case, that when free from the influence and restraints of government, men have done what was right in their own eyes, they have done that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

But it may be objected here, that it was not till a considerable time after this that the Israelites had their first King in the person of Saul; and consequently, that there is no propriety in the historian's remark " that there was no king then in Israel, because there never had been a king there." I answer, that by *King* in this place we ought to understand, *one invested with the power of government, or chief magistracy*; as was the case with Moses, Joshua, the Elders to whom the latter resigned his authority, and the various judges whom the Lord, on special occasions, miraculously raised up to deliver Israel from the oppressions of their enemies, and reprove them for, and reclaim them from those corruptions into which they were

so prone to fall. And it may be proper further to remark in this place, that the iniquity related in the context happened long before the time which it occupies in the history, even soon after the death of the Elders who succeeded Joshua in the government, and before the Lord raised up Othniel, the first of those extraordinary judges of Israel.

But it is time that we attend more particularly to the text. "In those days there was no king in Israel; and every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

It is a very natural and just inference from these words,

That a good government—a government founded upon the principles of equity and liberty—a government which provides for the reciprocal benefit of the governor, and the governed; and such a government duly administered, is one of the greatest temporal or civil blessings that heaven bestows upon a people or nation. And therefore it follows, that the overthrow of such a Government, and the introduction of disorder and Anarchy must be the worst calamity that any people can be visited with.



I apprehend that the authority of the holy scriptures ought to be admitted by us as supreme and decisive, in all cases to which it has a natural and obvious application. "How readest thou then?" Hear what Paul says, with respect to the subject we are now upon. "*There is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Wherefore we must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience-sake.*" Rom. xii. 1, 5. The meaning and intent of these passages I take to be, that God, the Great Sovereign and Ruler of the World, hath ordained for the security, the comfort and happiness of man, that communities and nations should be united under, and subject to civil government.

The goodness, the wisdom, and the necessity of such an institution will best appear when we fix our thoughts upon, and take a serious view of the depraved state of human nature, in consequence of the transgression and fall of our first parents, and the evil dispositions which were introduced into it by that melancholy event. Had all the descendants of Adam *now* the image of God as perfect and fair upon them, as it was upon him, when he came out of his Maker's hands; did they resemble the Great Creator in holiness, justice, and goodness, in the degree that *he* did; were their disposition and conduct uni-

versally conformable to the golden rule of "doing unto others what they could reasonably expect others to do unto them;"—did every one "love his neighbour as himself;" in that case, there would have been no necessity for civil government; for there would have been no vices to restrain, nor any transgressions to punish. If an *Equality* of innocence, benevolence and justice did universally pervade the community, there would have been of course no *Inequality* of Rank or Power.

But every candid observer of human nature must be sensible, that its present state is very remote from what has been now supposed. In defiance of the restraints that are laid upon, and the wrath and vengeance denounced against vice, both by divine and human laws; oppression and violence stalk through the earth, and interrupt the peace, the order and happiness of mankind. The institution of civil government, we ought then to regard as a merciful antidote or remedy, prepared by divine wisdom and goodness for these grievous evils; as a defence for our lives, our liberty, and our property, against the rapaciousness and violence of wicked and unreasonable men; amongst whom our lot may be cast. And this being the case, it is assuredly our duty, both  
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to yield cheerful obedience to its just laws, and to support its authority to the utmost of our power.

The *Forms* of government which have prevailed, and still do prevail, in different nations of the world are various, according to the different circumstances under which they were established; and the degrees in which they answer the end of their institution, even promoting the happiness of the community at large, as well as that of the individuals which compose it, are as various as those forms. Yea Truth extorts the painful confession, that wise, and good, as are the ends for which Government was ordained, it has too often been perverted into an instrument of oppression and Tyranny.

Through the special favor of heaven, that Form, or Constitution of government, which hath long obtained in this land; and which, I hope, will, through the divine goodness be continued in it to the latest generations, comprehends in it every principle that is requisite to answer the wise and good ends of its institution. In Britain all are entitled to the protection of the law; and none, however, elevated their rank, are exempt from its penalties. Every Equality, that the circumstances



stances and *Rights* of man admit of, prevails universally here. For the sake of promptness and energy of action, especially upon sudden emergencies, the executive part of Government is wisely vested in the Sovereign; but for the manner in which that trust is exercised, he is, in the persons of his Ministers or Advisers, accountable to the representatives of the people; who have a right to examine, remonstrate, censure, and even impeach. Britons are not subject to Royal Edicts; and nothing that relates either to police, or taxation, is obligatory upon them, till it has received the sanction of the three constituent estates of the realm, KING, LORDS, and COMMONS. Arbitrary requisitions, and the surrender of the fruits of the industry of years, to what is called the public service, are devices of government; are modes of supplying the public Treasury, which this country is, and I trust ever will be, a stranger to.

But I may perhaps be told, that though the principles of the British government were admitted to be equitable, just and wise, yet very great abuses prevail in the Administration of it. Strange indeed it would be, my friends, and very different from the ordinary course of human affairs, if, in the revolution of so many ages, and the

the succession of so many Administrators of the national business, something of that kind did not take place ! But where ought we to look for the cause of those evils which are so often, and loudly complained of ? Or rather, what is the reason they are not checked and reformed ? Does not the fault lie at the door of numbers of those who are most clamorous against ministerial influence and corruption ? The democratical branch of the British government, or the House of Commons, is intended by the very nature and spirit of the constitution, to watch over the measures, and, should it ever be necessary, to check the encroachments of the regal, or monarchical branch.

Once in seven years at farthest, the subjects have an opportunity of providing for the redress of any grievances they labor under, by appointing for their representatives in the legislature, men, in whose virtue, Patriotism and Independence they can repose confidence. Did the Electors of Britain, unequal as the state of Representation is, universally adopt, and act according to this Principle ; did they not suffer themselves to be wrought upon, in those most interesting seasons and concerns, by ministerial, Aristocratical, or Mercenary influence : did they entrust none with the most valuable of their temporal and civil interests,

terests, concerning whom they have not the fullest confidence that they will approve themselves faithful to their constituents and their country; Court influence would necessarily lose its fascinating power, and shrink back within its right bounds; the bribe would no longer attract by its lustre; the profer of Places and Honors would be spurned at; every instance of mal-administration would be soon remedied, and all the wheels of government would harmoniously move to promote the general good.

But so long as the choice of our Representatives in the Legislature, proceeds upon motives and views different from these; whilst those in whom the law hath vested the Elective Franchise, are so mean and servile in their disposition, and such enemies to their country, as to be more solicitous to serve their private interests; or to oblige those with whom they have connexions; on whom they are in any way dependent, or from whom they expect any advantageous returns; whilst this is the case, if any abuses or corruptions do exist in the administration of government, these—these are the persons to whom the nation should look as its enemies and betrayers.



I have now, my brethren, given you a faithful and undisguised account of the views I entertain of the British Constitution: and I have done it with the greater pleasure on account of the full persuasion I have, that your sentiments with regard to it are, in general, in unison with my own.

I rejoice, bretheren, in my connexion with that description of British subjects who have uniformly manifested the highest esteem of it, and given the most unequivocal proofs of zeal for its support. I glory in the recollection that not an individual Protestant Dissenter either engaged in, or abetted the rebellions in the last two reigns, that attempted to overthrow this excellent Constitution, and erect upon the ruins of it, DESPOTISM and POPERY.

But barely to say of our forefathers that they did not join and assist in those alarming rebellions, is most unjustly to detract from their merit. Notwithstanding the legal incapacities they labored under, and the dreadful penalties to which they thereby exposed themselves, when they saw the danger which threatened the Constitution of their country, they flew to arms, and united with heart hands in a courageous and successful opposition to the rebel bands.

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What the reward of their Loyalty and firm attachment to the laws and religion of their country was—I blush to mention. The statute which offered pardon to the rebels, contained in it a provision of indemnity from the penalties of the test and corporation acts for the protestant dissenters, who had so zealously opposed their progress. But over this part of the conduct of the Legislature of those days I would wish to draw the veil of charity and oblivion.

An inference which very naturally arises from what hath been now said is, that the subjects of this realm should be very thankful to divine providence for having given them a form or constitution of government, which hath been long the envy and admiration of foreigners; under which the nation hath enjoyed so much Liberty and Happiness, and attained to such a pitch of prosperity, power and renown; but they ought to impute to themselves; to place to the account of their own venality, and want of zeal for the public good, those abuses, if any, which prevail in the administration of government, since the correctives are within their power; and if they are not used, the fault is their own.

Further. Is it our desire to have the civil,  
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and more especially, the spiritual and religious blessings which are so largely enjoyed in this land continued to us? then let us beware that we do not provoke the most high God to deprive us of them. As it is Righteousness that exalteth a nation; that renders it secure and prosperous; on the other hand, Sin is both the reproach, and the ruin of any people. Astonishing indeed is the patience of God, that the wickedness of this land hath not long since brought down utter destruction upon it. How are the bounties of providence wasted in luxury, excess and riot? Licentiousness and impiety abound almost every where, and put virtue and religion out of countenance. People not only make *a mock of sin*, but even *glory* in it. "By reason of swearing the land mourneth." How dreadful are the oaths, the imprecations, and blasphemies which strike our ears almost from every quarter; which proceed from the mouths, not of the vulgar and illiterate only, but from their's also who pretend to have more cultivated minds, and more polished manners! Astonishing is the forbearance of the Most High in not taking such daring Transgressors at their word, and executing upon them the curses and damnation, which they impiously call for!

Think again of the little attention that is paid  
by



by the generality amongst us to the marvellous dispensation of God's mercy and grace. Though he hath given his well beloved Son to redeem us by his blood, yet how unhappily is the salvation which was thus wonderfully prepared, despised and neglected. He hath given us his word and his ordinances to enlighten us in the knowledge of the things which pertain to our peace, to teach us both our need of salvation, and the way in which it is to be obtained. But the sacred scriptures, men throw aside as if they had no manner of concern in them; and the services of God's house they forsake, as if instead of being a privilege, they were a greivous burthen.—That men might have opportunities for abstracting themselves from the cares and amusements of time and sense, for entering upon an intimate converse with their own hearts, and for bending the whole attention of their minds to the important concerns of their souls and eternity, the Lord separated and sanctified the sabbath day to be a season sacred to his service, and the prosecution of our eternal interests. But is it not a lamentable truth, that the merciful designs of Heaven in this institution, are impiously counteracted by those whose happiness it was intended to promote and secure? Not being permitted on the Lord's day to follow openly their secular occupations, instead of be-  
flowing

flowing one serious thought upon the service of God, and the affairs of their souls, and a world to come, numbers make no better use of the sacred hours than to offend God more heinously, and run into all the excesses of sin and wickedness. Sabbath breaking is an evil that is peculiarly offensive to the Most High; and it is spoken of in the Old Testament as a principal cause of the heavy judgments with which Israel was visited. "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, what evil thing is this that ye do, and prophane the sabbath day? Did not your father's thus: and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by prophaning the sabbath day." Nehem. 13. 17. 18.

You well know, my brethren, that what hath been now said concerning the prevalence and abounding of wickedness in this land, instead of being an exaggeration of the lamentable case, falls far short of the shocking enormity of it. Is there not therefore much reason to fear, that the long suffering of the Lord will have a speedy end, and that the vials of his terrible wrath will be poured out upon so corrupt and rebellious a nation?

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At this time we are unhappily engaged in a war, which has already caused a great addition to our public burdens, and in which numbers of our fellow citizens have perished. The enemy driven to desperation, and inured to all the exploits of savage ferocity, are, it is said, meditating an invasion of this country. What will be the issue of the enterprise, should it take place, human wisdom cannot foresee. But certain it is, that if God forsakes us for our sins, and employs those enemies, as his instruments, to punish us; despicable as they may be in our eyes, and unprepared as we may consider them for such an attempt, we shall not be able to resist them: for the council of the Lord will, and must prevail.

Do we believe that the Most High ruleth in the earth, and disposeth of the kingdoms and powers of it as he pleaseth? then let us endeavour to engage his protection for ourselves and our country; and in that case, "no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper."—The way to do that is to humble ourselves before him; to lament over our sins, and forsake them. "Wash ye, make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well: Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. If ye be willing



willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land ; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isaiah i. 16, &c.

Those then are the best patriots, whatever their circumstances or stations in life are ; those discover the purest love for their country, and deserve most from it, who endeavour to stem the evils, which threaten to bring down upon it the judgments of the Lord ; who are earnestly resolved to reform the errors of their own conduct, and strive by their example, at least, to influence others to do the same. The Lord grant the number of such may be daily increasing, that iniquity may draw back, and hide its odious head, and righteousness, justice and piety abound, and run down our streets as a mighty stream. Then may we hope that Almighty God will dwell amongst us as our defence and our glory, and that our invaluable privileges, temporal, civil, and religious will yet be continued unto us.

How highly should we esteem the blessed gospel which reveals, and promises to the christian " a kingdom that cannot be moved ;" in which no dissensions shall take place, and whose sacred borders no enemy can invade or approach. That

is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May we all be followers of him in the way that leadeth to it. Let us submit to his authority, and trust him for guidance, support, and defence upon our journey, and he will assuredly invest us with all the everlasting blessings of it.—

**AMEN.**

**12 MR 58**

**F I N I S.**

How highly should we esteem the blessed Gospel which reveals and promises to the Christian "a kingdom that cannot be moved;" in which no dissensions shall take place, and whose sacred borders no enemy can invade or approach. That

